



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
St. Louis District®

Press Release

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Memorial Day Weekend Calls for Water Safety

St. Louis – A series of drownings last year at Carlyle Lake and in the St. Louis metro area illustrate the importance of remaining vigilant when it comes to boating and water safety.

Drowning is the nation's second leading cause of accidental death for children. An estimated 70 percent of reported boating fatalities in 2004 occurred on boats where the operator had not received safety instruction, and of those victims who drowned, nearly 90 percent were not wearing life jackets.

President George W. Bush signed a proclamation May 12, making May 20-26 National Safe Boating Week. He urged all Americans to learn more about safe boating practices and always engage in proper and responsible conduct while on the water. He also noted the 35th anniversary of the Federal Boat Safety Act, which has helped reduce the number of recreational boating deaths in our country.

"By taking simple precautions such as wearing a life jacket, taking a boating safety course, getting a Vessel Safety Check, and never boating under the influence of alcohol or drugs, we can continue to save lives and reduce the number of accidents and injuries that occur each year," the proclamation states.

National Safe Boating Week is an annual nationwide event that precedes Memorial Day weekend and is dedicated to raising the awareness of boating safety. The campaign's theme, "Wear It!" is designed to emphasize the importance of each boater wearing a life jacket.

Below are safety tips from the Army Corps of Engineers to help recreation seekers stay safe in the water over the Memorial Day holiday weekend and into the summer.

Alcohol and water don't mix

Approximately one-third of all boating accidents and fatalities involve alcohol. Just one beer can impair balance, vision, judgment, and reaction time. Research shows that four hours of boating produces fatigue that simulates drunkenness. Boating fatigue combined with alcohol consumption intensifies the effects of both and increases accident risks.

Boaters

Boaters should take appropriate safety classes, be familiar with governing state laws and have proper safety equipment onboard before boating.

Within the St. Louis area it is important for boaters to know Missouri and Illinois state laws. Many states require boater education or boat operator licenses. As an added incentive, most insurance companies offer discounts to boaters who have successfully completed a boating safety course.

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Wear a life jacket – don't just carry one on board. Make sure it is U.S. Coast Guard approved and appropriately sized. Most states, including Illinois, require children under the age of 13 to wear life jackets. In Missouri, the state law requires children under 7 to wear life jackets.

Don't overload the boat (consider boat size, the number of passengers, and extra equipment before loading). Check your boat for all required safety equipment. Carry a set of navigational charts. Check the weather forecast. File a float plan with family or friends who are not on the vessel.

Learn to Swim

Surprisingly, two-thirds of those who drown never had the intention of being in the water. Watch your children at all times when around the water. Never dive into lakes and rivers. Never rely on toys such as inner tubes and water wings to stay afloat. Don't take chances by over-estimating your swimming skills. Reach or throw a floatation device to help someone in trouble. Don't go in the water! Swim only in designated swimming areas. Never swim alone.

Water safety must be a top priority for everyone using the nation's waterways and lakes this summer. An estimated 360 million people visit U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recreation areas annually. Corps statistics show that most drownings occur during peak visitation, on weekends during the months of April through September. Fifty percent of all incidents occur between June and July when the projects are the busiest and water temperatures are warmest. Males constitute 90 percent of all Corps water-related fatalities.

Please make your visit to any recreation area a safe and enjoyable one. Taking water safety precautions saves lives – maybe your own.

The St. Louis District project offices offer on-site water safety programs on weekends during the recreation season. The public is encouraged to call for additional information.

Illinois:

Carlyle Lake	618-594-2484
Lake Shelbyville	217-774-3951
National Great Rivers Museum	618-462-6979
Rend Lake	618-724-2493

Missouri:

Mark Twain Lake	573-735-4097
Rivers Project Office	636-899-2600
Wappapello Lake	573-222-8562

*For more tips on water safety, visit the Corps' water safety web site at
<http://watersafety.usace.army.mil/>*

*Visit **www.cgaux.org** for information on boating classes.*

*View the Coast Guard federal regulations governing boating at **<http://www.uscgboating.org/>***